UNIT 1 BACKGROUND

Structure

1.0 Objectives

1.1 Introduction : Why Background?

1.2 Upward Social Mobility and mid-Victorian Society

1.3 From Social History to the History of Form

1.4 *Great Expectations* and the Fairytale

1.5 Let Us Sum Up

1.6 Glossary

1.7 Questions

1.0 OBJECTIVES

The aim of this Unit is to provide background information which will, I hope, be useful for a better understanding of the novel. After reading this Unit carefully you will be able to

- appreciate why background information is relevant to the study of a text;
- outline the social and historical background of nineteenth century England;
- relate certain shared assumptions of English society in the nineteenth century to the text;
- see how *Great Expectations* emerged out of prevalent popular cultural forms, especially the fairytale.

1.1 INTRODUCTION : WHY BACKGROUND?

As a teacher at Sri Venkateswara College, Delhi, I know that the background classes tend to be the most directionless part of any set of lectures. I've often heard students complain that they can't see the point of being loaded with details about the Victorian Age or "the rise of the novel" when they find it difficult enough to get through massive nineteenth century novels like *Dombey and Son* or *Middlemarch*. I think, therefore, that the least a teacher can do before she/he proceeds to overwhelm students with the mass of details that will make up the "background", is to try to explain to herself/himself, as well as to her/his students the ways in which background information is likely to be helpful.

I think that one inclusive way in which we might think of the **background** to any text is to see it **as the whole complex web of factors**, indeed as the element in which a text gains its existence just as water is the element in which a fish lives. I think that while you'd probably agree that there would be no fish without water, and no text without the conditions that produced it, you'd still insist that the complicated conditions in which a text is produced are as difficult to grasp as water. And that really is the problem with the background, not its vagueness, but the sheer mass of

available data all of which is connected in some way or the other with the production of the text. Put another way, the challenge for the teacher is to select from the "background" those details, or combination of details that have the ability to make the text spring to life. I can promise you that background information does have this ability to animate a text — make it more relevant than it might otherwise have been.

Let me give you an example from my own experience which I hope will not be without relevance to our study of *Great Expectations*. When I was doing my M.Phil., I chose to write my term paper on a novel of Dickens called *Dombey and Son*. I did this because I was struck by what seemed to me to be dramatic differences between society as it was described in *Dombey and Son* and the world of an early novel (*Oliver Twist*), which I had read some time ago. The central problem in *Oliver Twist* was, it seemed to me, poverty, not only because the novel contained vivid descriptions of urban poverty and an angry denunciation of the New Poor Law of 1834 but also because Oliver's own story dramatised the sense of social insecurity that an unstable economy always breeds in the poor. On the other hand, *Dombey and Son* had seemed to describe a technologically advanced, economically flourishing society where most people seemed to be doing very well for themselves. Naturally I wanted to find out whether this change had something to do with changes that were taking place in England between 1837 (when Dickens began *Oliver Twist*) and 1848 when Dickens published *Dombey and Son*.

I had the good fortune to stumble on a great book by E.J.Hobsbawn called *Industry and Empire* which described the economic history of England during the nineteenth century. I still remember the excitement with which I read Hobsbawm's account of the transformation of Britain's industrial economy from the instability of the first phase of the Industrial Revolution which was based on the manufacture of a single item — textiles — to the consolidated heavy industry phase when Britain's monopoly over iron, steel and industrial technology energised its economy as never before. Moreover, Hobsbawm had argued that the most dramatic and popular symbol of the levels of speed, efficiency and organisation that Britain's new industrial economy was attaining was the railway. You will be able to appreciate how important this piece of information was to me when I tell you that the railway appears in *Dombey and Son* as a central symbol for progress, but also for some of the human problems that it caused. In fact Hobsbawm's book provided the basis for an essay that I wrote on *Dombey and Son*, where I argued that this novel marked the transition from the socially and economically unstable thirties to the prosperous and technologically advanced society of the late forties, and that while Dickens responded positively to the rising standards of living and efficiency brought about by the second or heavy industry phase of the Industrial Revolution, he also exposed the human dangers attendant on a society where the impersonal structures of gigantic industries begin to dominate the human being. So you see, background information can light up a text from within, as it were.

But I must pause at this point to say to you that I went into this rather long account of *Dombey and Son*, progress and its problems, not only because I had wanted to illustrate the ways in which background material can be used in relation to the text but also because one important aspect of an economically buoyant society -- its prospensity to promote upward social mobility among those who inhabit it -- will turn out to be the starting point of what I have to say on *Great Expectations*.

1.2 UPWARD SOCIAL MOBILITY AND MID-VICTORIAN SOCIETY

I hope that you will agree that one of the most obvious effects of any sustained economic boom is that it promotes upward social mobility. The huge profits made by mid-Victorian industrialists implied at least some increase in the wages of the

working classes, and gigantically complex organisations like the railways opened up the job opportunities not only for unskilled workers but also for professionally trained engineers, accountants and managers. Put another way, mid-Victorian Britain, enriched by exports to the rest of Europe and by the ruthless exploitation of colonial markets, was internally a land full of opportunities. This was the point that a self-satisfied ruling elite repeatedly made. It was Queen Victoria's Prime Minister Lord Palmerston himself, who declared in a speech that has become one of the classic documents of its time:

> We have shown the example of a nation in which every class of society accepts with cheerfulness the lot which providence has assigned to it, while at the same time each individual of each class is constantly trying to raise himself in the social scale, not by violence and illegality but by the steady and energetic exertion of moral and intellectual faculties with which his creator has endowed him.

Lord Palmerston was not, of course the only person who spoke of the prospect of perpetual advancement by the steady application of one's "intellectual and moral faculties". Bagehot's idea of "removable inequalities", the more well-known Smilesian ideal of "self culture", the huge volume of "improving literature", that began appearing after the late forties, the phenomenal success of works like Smiles's *Lives of the Engineers* (1862) and Diana Mulock's *John Halifax Gentleman* (1856), all testify to the fact that in the booming fifties and sixties, the ideology of self-improvement had begun to enjoy widespread acceptance.

All this is simple enough, but I think that the interesting thing when you are analysing any system of thought or "discourse", if you like, is to prise open its internal contradictions. When we get down to discussing *Great Expectations*, I shall try to show that Dickens too was critically concerned with the internal contradictions within the discourse of self-improvement as it was officially articulated. I want at this stage only to make you aware of how classic self-improvement texts, such as the novel *John Halifax Gentleman*, seek to reconcile what were, in fact, conflicting ideologies. Thus *John Halifax* projects virtues like work, thrift, enterprise as the means of self-improvement, but the reward that it offers to its self-improving hero is a leisured, aristocratic lifestyle. Put another way, *John Halifax* (like many other improvement stories) epitomises the social compromise by which the makers of the Industrial Revolution gave up their commitment to the great entrepreneurial values and began to emulate the lifestyle of the aristocracy. Thus as its very title suggests, *John Halifax Gentleman* dramatises the emergence of "gentlemanliness" — an ideal based on a leisured lifestyle rather than on productiveness, on a liberal outlook rather than on professional commitment — as an almost universal object of desire. Perhaps you will have noticed if you've read *Great Expectations* (and by this time you really ought to have read it) that in this novel too gentlemanliness is a goal towards which many characters strive. For example, Pip himself realises soon that the only way he can win Estella's love is by transforming himself into a gentleman, and if the criminal Magwitch cannot himself hope to acquire a gentlemanly status, he seeks, at least, to produce a gentleman. But in the units that follow I will try to show that Dickens's attitude to problems like "self-improvement" or "gentlemanliness" is far more complex than that, for instance, of Diana Mulock's in *John Halifax*. My limited aim in this section was to familiarise you with the common connotations of terms like "self-improvement", "Smilesian", (after the most popular proponent of the self-improvement ideal Samuel Smiles), and "gentlemanliness" (in its nineteenth century sense) — terms which you will encounter all the time in our subsequent discussions. I hope too that you can now see the connections between a booming economy and the proliferation of "improvement plots", or between the social compromise that the captains of industry made with the aristocracy and the emergence of gentlemanliness as an important theme in *Great Expectations*.

1.3 FROM SOCIAL HISTORY TO THE HISTORY OF FORM

In response to a question from the newspaper *Novy Mir,* the great Soviet critic Mikhail Bakhtin wrote: "Literature is an inseparable part of culture....It must not be severed from the rest of culture nor, as is frequently done, can it be correlated to socio-economic factors, as it were behind culture's back". Bakhtin's words are important because they make a distinction between the social and political factors that may get **reflected** in a novel, and the whole mass of other novels, poems, fairytales, forms of visual entertainment that determine how a novelist constructs his/her plots, scenes or characters. That is why I propose, in this section, to follow Bakhtin and shift my focus in this section from the social history which *Great Expectations* may be said to negotiate to the cultural field crisscrossed with many forms and fragments of forms within which Dickens found his feet as writer. (Of-course here, as in the earlier section, I will be selective, and pick only on those strands from the relevant cultural field that have a direct bearing on *Great Expectations*).

Before I get into the problem of the relationship between Dickens's writing and the cultural field out of which it grew, let me ask you a question. You'll have to read a novel (any novel) of Jane Austen in order to answer my question. (In case you haven't and let me confess to you in strict confidence that I hadn't either until quite late in my life) no problem: spend five or six days reading *Mansfield Park* or *Pride* and *Prejudice*. Then ask yourself whether these novels differ in some fundamental sense from *Great Expectations*? Perhaps you can begin to answer this question by taking into account one of the most noticeable things about a Jane Austen novel: that it works almost entirely within the network of the upper and middle class homes which provides it with both its subject as well as its readership. In fact, a novel like *Mansfield Park* may be seen as an almost classical product of what the German critic and philosopher Habermas called the "bourgeois public sphere". Habermas argued that the eighteenth century English novel embodied the need of the emerging middle class to discuss its domestic life in public as you can see in the novels of Jane Austen. This meant that a novel like *Mansfield Park* would have a certain internal integrity in relation not only to its content but also to its method. You'd never find Jane Austen drawing on the expressive resources of "lower" forms such as the fairytales to make her effects. For example wouldn't a character like Miss Havisham seem terribly out-of-place in *Mansfield Park*?

By contrast the Dickensian novel came out of the far more chaotic popular print market of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries: a cultural domain that encourages not the autonomous development of forms, but their constant intermixing. If I were to pick one event that may be said to have brought into existence the print market in which Dickens's writing developed it would surely be the painter Hogarth's momentous decision to break free from the compulsion of producing single, unrepeatable paintings commissioned and consumed by a single aristocratic patron. Instead Hogarth decided to employ the technique of engraving to produce multiple copies of a series of six prints that he entitled "The Harlot's Progress" and to sell each set to the general public for six guineas. By undertaking to produce multiple copies of a picture series that would not so much be created as "Invented, Painted, Engraved, and Published" by him, Hogarth initiated what the German critic Walter Benjamin was to call many years later "the age of mechanical reproduction" in the arts. Benjamin's landmark essay makes many brilliant points, and it is impossible for me to go into all of them, but one idea of Benjamin's that is directly relevant to us is that of "reactivation". Benjamin argues that the mechanical reproduction of any work of art smashes its "aura", its fixed unique existence in an art gallery or the art owner's house and enables the consumer (of the reproduced print) to meet it in his or her environment. This transference across social space,

Benjamin argues, results in the "reactivation" of the work of art. In its adaptation to its new environment and in its interaction with the forms of expression prevalent in that environment it gets reactivated. You could, if you looked around you, find many examples of the sort of "reactivation" that Benjamin was talking about. For example, think of how melodies from forgotten Bombay films get "reactivated" in the jingles that accompany television advertisements. In Hogarth's case, the implications of this sort of "reactivation" were far in excess of what he might have anticipated when he produced the Harlot series. The transformation of the Hogarthian art work from a unique object to a cultural commodity resulted not only in the proliferation of cheaper and cheaper reprints, but also of the adaptation of Hogarth's ideas, themes and characters in melodramas, pantomimes and, through the first decades of the nineteenth century, in novels.

You are probably wondering by now what this long discussion about Hogarth, Benjamin and "mechanical reproduction" has to do with the question about the differences between Jane Austen and Dickens that I asked you. I would like to say in my defence that the history of reproductions and adaptations across a very wide range of genres that Hogarth's prints themselves experienced, tells us a great deal not only about the print market in which Dickens found his feet as a writer, but also, ultimately about the forms of the Dickensian novel itself. More specifically, unlike the relatively autonomous, middle-class public sphere within which Jane Austen's novels had developed, Dickens's novels came out of a cultural field that encouraged the constant traffic of representational methods, plot patterns, themes, modes of organisation across a wide range of genres and media. Dickens's own emergence into the domain of letters as the script writer of a book of city sketches by Cruickshank, shows the sort of interaction that went on all the time in the popular print market of the early nineteenth century, and although by *Pickwick Papers* the Dickensian novel had established itself as a cultural commodity in its own right, the conditions of its evolution gave to the Dickensian novel a certain formal open-endedness. This meant that while Dickens's novels could never achieve the sustained focus on the internal world of the middle and upper classes that gave to Austen's novels their formal integrity, they were capable of constantly absorbing expressive modes, techniques of characterisation, principles of plot construction that had originated in various extra-novelistic modes such as Cruickshank's sketches of London or the radical political satire that appeared in the pages of *Punch*.

1.4 *GREAT EXPECTATIONS* AND THE FAIRYTALE

Dickens gained a great deal from his interaction with a very wide range of popular forms, but in this section I will focus only on Dickens's relationship with the fairytale because, as we shall see later, expressive resources that had germinated in the fairy tale become "reactivated" in very interesting ways in *Great Expectations*. Dickens's relationship with the fairytale was complex as well as reason interesting. This was because Dickens encountered this form at that critical point of its evolution when it was losing its roots in the harsh preliterate peasant culture, being drawn into the vortex of print entertainment. In this process, it was becoming reconstituted, on the one hand, as the pleasant children's stories familiar to us today, and on the other hand, as the supernatural tales of terror that appeared among other gory stories in the "penny dreadfuls". Dickens was of course very familiar with the pleasant fairytales, disseminated, as they were in England by translated versions of the Grimms's compilation and by Cruickshank's illustrations. In fact, fragments of this kind of fairytale are visible all over Dickens's early fiction — in the fairy godmothers and the evil ogres, the faithful beasts and the gloomy castles, but above all in a plot pattern which underlines novels such as *Oliver Twist*, and which depends on magical

interventions of a fairy godmother or father to sort out real difficulties. (I will try to show later how this plot pattern is replicated in *Great Expectations* only to be "deformed"). On the other hand, if you read a semi-autobiographical piece called the "Nurse's Story", you will see how Mary, who worked in the Dickens household regaled the young Charles with tales of supernatural terror, very different from the kind of children's stories that we have been talking about. I think that Mary typified the *plebian consciousness* that sustained and disseminated the nightmarish, macabre elements inherent in the original "folk" form of fairytale. Put another way, Mary's stories, despite their sensationalism, may be seen as the conduit which carried to the young Dickens certain key elements of the older form of the fairytale: the sombreness of their atmosphere, their discontinuous prose, their occasionally brutal language, but above all, their use of magical elements as the means not of providing simplified moral resolutions, but of confronting their characters and readers with disconcerting paradoxes and desperate choices. We shall see later just how important the reactivation of this latter version of the fairytale was to the Satis House scenes in *Great Expectations*.

1.5 LET US SUM UP

Let me pause here, for awhile and summarise the main points I have made so far. I hope, first of all, I have managed to convince you that it is worth your while getting to know the historical background of any text. You always have the chance of finding something here that will illuminate the text. For example, I found in E.J. Hobsbawm's *Industry and Empire* the key to many of the problems that I wanted to deal with in my term paper on *Dombey and Son*.

Hobsbawm's book may in fact be said to provide the backdrop for Dickens's later novels as a whole – and I have tried to show how the economic boom that Hobsbawm delineates generated a sort of upward social mobility with which *Great Expectations* is concerned. I've suggested however that inherent in official assertions of progress was the contradiction in Smilesian virtues that were the means of self-improvement and the leisured class existence that was very often its goal. I've also suggested that this contradiction was to have great significance for *Great Expectations*. In this unit I've also been concerned with a second kind of history – the history of the print market where Dickens found his feet as a writer. Here I've argued that the print market that the late eighteenth century painter Hogarth, above all, may be said to have brought to maturity encouraged not formal autonomy but the constant interaction between the expressive modes of disparate genres. This meant that the Dickensian novel was always capable of absorbing within its relatively loose structure the expressive modes of various extraliterary genres. I've concluded this unit by suggesting that one such extra-novelistic mode that was important at many levels to the making of *Great Expectations* was the fairytale.

1.6 GLOSSARY

Middlemarch	One of great novels in the English language. It was written by George Eliot. I mentioned it only because like most 19th century English novels it was nearly 900 pages long.
New Poor Law 1834	a law enacted in 1834 to deal with the problem of paupers. It became unpopular with the poor and writer like Dickens because it stipulated that the poor could get relief only in prison-like work houses.

Industrial Revolution	a series of technical developments through the late 18th and 19th centuries which industrialised the British economy.
Lord Palmerston	Queen Victoria's prime minister
Walter Bagehot	Political scientist, literary critic and a prolific contributor to the highbrow Victorian periodicals.
Self Help	Samuel Smiles's most popular book. It provides a simple scheme for self improvement.
Novy Mir	A Soviet Paper
Mikhail Bakhtin	*Problems of Dostoyevsky's Poetics* (1984)
Habermas	*The Structural Transformation of the Bourgeois Public Sphere* (1980)
Hogarth	One of England's greatest painters. He revolutionised painting by moving away from mythological subjects and depicting contemporary street scenes, or the social life of both the rich and poor.
Guinea	former British gold coin, worth one pound one shilling.
Walter Benjamin	The essay refered to, i.e., 'The Work of Art in the Age Of Mechanical Reproduction' appears in his book *Illuminations* (1969)
Punch	a satirical and during its initial years, a radical periodical. Many nineteenth century writers like Dickens and Thackeray were closely associated with it.
'Penny dreadfuls'	a piece of cheap, sensational fiction, especially a novel or novelette in magazine form or paperback, characterised by violent episodes and maudlin sentiment.
Plebian	belonging to the common people; common, vulgar, coarse.

1.7 QUESTIONS

I think that I need to preface this section on questions with some explanation about what my intentions are. Please don't make the mistake of assuming that any of these questions are likely to appear in the examinations. Rather they are meant to help you to revise what we do in each unit, and also to draw your attention to certain points in the units which are important, but which you might have missed. I do hope, however, that as you gain mastery over each unit you will gradually grow in confidence and be able to handle the sort of questions that you are likely encounter in the examinations. Keeping the intentions behind these questions in mind. Please try to answer the following, looking up the relevant portions in this unit whenever you are in doubt.

1) In what way did the "second" or "heavy industry" phase of the Industrial Revolution change the "condition of England"? If you had to find out more about this subject, what book would you read?

2) What would you say was the most important point of difference between the world of *Oliver Twist* and that of *Great Expectations*?

3) Write a few lines about "gentlemanliness" as it was understood in the nineteenth century.

4) Explain the following terms : "middle class public sphere", "reactivation", "mechanical reproduction". Can you think of some examples of reactivation from the cultural field around you apart from what I have already given?

5) Would you say that the relationship between *Great Expectations* and the fairy tale was a complex rather than a simple one? Think over this question carefully, and in your answer, bring as much of the material that you have covered so far to bear on it as you can.

6) While writing this unit I have refered to the works of three great writers on history and culture: E.J. Hobsbawm, Walter Benjamin and Mikhail Bakhtin. Can you recapitulate the arguments that I have cited from their works? If any of these arguments interest you move to the last Unit and locate the book from which these arguments have been taken. Also try to carry in your mind some idea of the kinds of problems that would be likely to interest these writers so that if you come across some related problem you can go the library and look at the catalogue for a book by Benjamin or Bakhtin which might deal with that problem. I can promise you that if you can overcome the initial difficulty of reading these writers they are likely to offer the most incisive insights that you are going to get on the relevant problem. Make a habit of remembering the names of writers whose citings seem interesting to you. I think that this is one basic way that you can find your way through the vast, often uncharted, univers of books.

UNIT 2 *GREAT EXPECTATIONS* AND SELF-IMPROVEMENT

Structure

2.0 Objectives

2.1 Introduction

2.2 The Self-Improving Hero and The Problem of Gentlemanliness

2.3 The Self-Improving Hero and the Problem of his Past

2.4 Gentlemanliness and Love

2.5 Let Us Sum Up

2.6 Glossary

2.7 Questions

2.0 OBJECTIVES

After reading this Unit carefully you will, I hope, be able to understand how the two ideas prevalent in Victorian society — that of self-improvement and gentlemanliness – are intricately worked into the fabric of *Great Expectations*. This will help us to further see how the social and cultural contexts provide a more complex perspective on the text. Our aim is not just to "read" the novel and follow the plot but to "study" it in some depth. And as we had discussed in the previous unit, a working knowledge of the background helps us see the complex relationship between literature and the society from which it emerges.

2.1 INTRODUCTION

In this unit, I will deal with the relationship between *Great Expectations* and two important ideas about which I hope by this time you have a working knowledge. The first of these, to recapitulate very quickly, is the idea of self-improvement which, as I have said, enjoyed enormous prestige in the booming fifties and sixties, and which was associated with the classic middle class values such as thrift, diligence and hard work. A short name for this complex of values is "Smilesian" after Samuel Smiles whose book *Self Help* was probably the most popular articulation of the ideology of self-improvement.

The other idea that will crop up repeatedly in this unit is that of "gentlemanliness" which was in many improvement stories the paradoxical reward promised to the improving hero — paradoxical, because "gentlemanliness" was essentially the embodiment of a "cultured", "liberal", "leisured", in short, of an essentially "aristocratic" lifestyle.

2.2 THE SELF-IMPROVING HERO AND THE PROBLEM OF GENTLEMANLINESS

Great Expectations has, as one of its starting points, a classic motif of improvement literature — the hero's determination to better his lot. Although Pip is exposed all the time to his dissatisfaction with his life in a backward provincial town, his desire to improve himself is projected in the novel as both understandable and admirable. Exposed always to the bullying of the likes of Pumblechook, struggling through the alphabets "as if it had been a bramble bush" (p.75) under the tutelage of a ridiculous old woman of "limited means, and unlimited infirmity" (p.74). [All the quotations that I have used here are from the Penguin edition of *Great Expectations*. The page numbers that you see in parenthesis will tell you where to find the passage , if you wish to see.] Without friends like Joe and Biddy, who cannot, in any case, help him in his quest for a better life, the young Pip's prospects are anything but inspiring. Pip himself describes his situation in the following manner:

> I used to stand about the churchyard on Sunday evenings when night was falling, comparing my own perspective with the windy marsh view, and making out some likeness between them by thinking how flat and low both were, and how on both there came in an unknown way a dark mist and then the sea. (p.135).

A glimpse of the "gentlemanly" life style

Pip expresses his instinct for self-improvement more positively in his determined quest for education as a means of improving his lot. Pip grasps every opportunity to further his education — he enlarges to Miss Havisham "upon my knowing nothing and wanting to know everything, in the hope that she might offer some help towards that desirable end" (p.123), invests all his extra money on books, and is always poring over them, "to improve myself" (p.152). Pip's pursuit of knowledge under difficulties has led at least one critic (Robin Gilmour) to see in this "essentially moral struggle" a representative pathos which justifies the use of Smiles's favourite term "self culture". The relationship between *Great Expectations* and the ideology of improvement is never reiterative, however, and one way in which we can gauge the complexity with which Dickens treats the self-improvement theme is by comparing the course of Pip's "progress" with that of *David Copperfield*.

As you probably know, Dickens wrote *David Copperfield* some ten years before he began *Great Expectations*. Do please try to read this novel. I know that *David Copperfield* is a very long novel as nineteenth century novels so often are, but I do think it would be worth your while going through it because comparisons between *David Copperfield* and *Great Expectations* will enter into our discussions at many points. For the time being, I am assuming that you have not yet read *David Copperfield*, and so let me to draw your attention to some details in the novel which you need to know in order to respond to the comparison that I am about to make between David and Pip. Among all of Dickens's novels, *David Copperfield* probably offers the most sympathetic depiction of the middle class work ethic and of the idea of self-improvement. Thus David's progress through the novel is predicated above all on his increasingly serious attitude to his work and the beneficial effect that this productive existence has on the growth of his inner life. Crucial therefore to David's development is the existence of a milieu that will encourage and sustain the middle class attitude to work and to self culture. In *David Copperfield* this milieu is provided by his aunt Betsy Trotwood (who begins as an eccentric, then plays the role of the fairy godmother before settling down to her role as the novel's most articulate spokesperson for middle class values), by Traddles, David's friend, and of course by Agnes the girl whom David finally marries. As you might guess the great danger that David faces (but overcomes) is the possibility that he might be led astray by the influence of the stylish, leisured, but utterly unproductive "gentlemanly" lifestyle embodied in his other friend, Steerforth.

Pip's quest for self-improvement is far more complicated than David's and of course part of Pip's difficulties can be understood in terms of his individual shortcomings. But what seems to me to be interesting is not so much Pip's subjective failures as the absence, in the world of *Great Expectations*, of situations and milieus where the Smilesian parable can work itself out. I hope that you can see that there is room here for an interesting comparison with *David Copperfield*. In the earlier novel as I have already suggested, the stable middle class world of Betsy Trotwood, Traddles and Agnes had provided a context conducive to the full development of David's productive faculties; and if the leisured, upper class lifestyle of Steerforth had exercised a dangerous influence on David, the whole business of the novel had been to marginalise and overcome that danger. What was marginal in *David Copperfield* moves to the very centre in *Great Expectations*. The world of *Great Expectations* has no place for Betsy Trotwood or Tommy Traddles and improvement implies emulating the arrogant genteel behaviour embodied in Miss Havisham and Estella. (Can you see here an example of the complexity of the relationship between the text and the social background? What you had learned in the earlier unit about the cultural domination of the aristocracy over the social life of the nation now appears in *Great Expectations* not as a passing detail but as a determining element in the making of the plot of the novel.)

To go on, the absence in *Great Expectations* of an enabling milieu for the development of middle class virtues has major implications for the whole problem of self improvement, because in a world hegemonised by predominantly upper class notions about what constitutes the good life, the urge for improvement is constantly mediated by the language of class. Accordingly if Pip's exposure to Satis House arouses in him the desire for a better life it also exposes him to the full blast of upper class arrogance.

> "He calls the knaves jacks, this boy!", said Estella with disdain before our first game was out. "And what coarse hands he has! and what thick boots!"
>
> I had never thought of being ashamed of my hands before; but I began to consider them a very indifferent pair. Her contempt for me was so strong, that it became infectious and I caught it. (p.90)

Hopelessly, and given the hegemonic influence of gentility, inevitably implicated in genteel aspirations, incapable of attaining a distinctive Smilesian identity, Pip cannot confront upper class arrogance with the confident (and idealised) dignity of say *John Halifax* (Remember, the novel I referred to earlier?). On the contrary, the realities of class relations constantly expose the self-improving hero to the "smart without a name" (p.92). And the pursuit of knowledge under difficulties, far from imparting moral and logical coherence to Pip's development, leads only to a total loss of direction.

> What I wanted who can say? How can I say when I never knew? (pp. 135-6).

2.3 THE SELF-IMPROVING HERO AND THE PROBLEM OF HIS PAST

Humiliation is not the only danger that confronts the self-improving hero in *Great Expectations*. After the sensational reversal in his fortunes, Pip does succeed in repressing the most humiliating experiences of his childhood, but his elevation to the status of a gentleman raises problems of another kind.

> "Since your change of fortune and prospects, you have have changed your companions," said Estella. "Naturally," said I.
> "And necessarily," she added, in a haughty tone; "what was fit company for you once, would be quite unfit for you now." (p.258).

In its haughty exclusiveness, Estella's tone belongs specifically to the genteel ethos. At the same time Estella's insistence about the incompatibility between the upwardly mobile hero's past and his improved situation in fact makes explicit what seems to me to be one of the central repressed presuppositions even in the most overtly Smilesian versions of improvement literature. There is no disjunction between the point of view of John Halifax and that of his creator when at the end of the novel the former responds to the world of the poor (in which his past is deeply implicated) with a mixture of apprehension and moral self-righteousness. Again in *David Copperfield* Dickens is able to sustain the smooth trajectory of David's progress only by depriving the socially awkward aspects of his past of any claim that they might have on him, by protecting him from the embarrassment of an encounter with say, Mealy Potatoes. (You would know if you've even begun to read *David Copperfield* that Mealy Potatoes is an uncared for street urchin who works with David when, during a nightmarish but brief period, David is taken off school and made to work in a blackening factory. David runs away from the blackening factory to his aunt Betsy Trotwood where he is rehabilitated into the respectable world. Once this happens

David's past is completely erased, it is never allowed to resurface again.) In other words, one way in which *David Copperfield* (and indeed the conventional "improvement" novel as a whole) is able to preserve inviolate the hero's progress is by silencing the world of his past, by denying it the right to interact with and to possibly qualify his final success. In *Great Expectations*, on the hand, at least one character refuses to play by the rules of the conventional improvement novel. When the "gentlemanly" Pip comes face to face with the tailor's boy in his home town and effects "a serene and unconscious" attitude towards him, the result is disaster

> Suddenly the knees of Trabb's boy smote together, his hair uprose, his cap fell off, he trembled violently in every limb, staggered out into the road, and crying to the populace, "Hold me I'm so frightened!" feigned to be in a paroxyism of terror and contrition, occasioned by the dignity of my appearance ....
>
> I had not gone much further down the street as the post office, when I again beheld Trabb's boy shooting round by a back way. This time he was entirely changed. He wore his blue bag in the manner of my greatcoat, and was strutting along the pavement towards me in the opposite side of the street, attended by a company of delighted young friends to whom he from time to time exclaimed, with a wave of his hand, "Don't know yah!" Words cannot state the amount of aggravation and injury wreaked upon me by Trabb's boy, when, passing abreast of me, he pulled up his shirt collar, twined up his side hair, stuck an arm akimbo, and smirked extravagantly by wriggling his elbows and his body, and saying to his attendants "Don't know yah, don't know yah, upon m soul don't know yah!"(p.267).

In this parodic reenactment of Estella's pronouncement, the codes of gentility are dragged, as it were, to the streets. From the point of view of the excluded majority of those who inhabit the streets — these codes appear to be a system of ridiculous posturings, and Pip's attempt to wipe out the memory of his old acquaintances from his consciousness, far from being natural and necessary as Pip and Estella would have it, is shown to involve the crassest kind of snobbery.

It is not, however, with Trabb's boy but with Joe that Pip's early life is most deeply implicated and a measure of the complexity with which Dickens treats the improvement theme in *Great Expectations* is that, unlike his delineation of the David Pegotty relationship (Pegotty is David's nurse whose plebian identity is conveniently subsumed within the *bonhomie* which always envelops her relationship with David), he makes it impossible for Pip to bring his relationship with Joe in consonance with the requirements of gentility. Joe's response to the young Pip we know has always been affectionate as well as egalitarian. Thus, unlike Mrs. Joe, Pumblechook, Wopsle and indeed everybody who inhabits the world of Pip's childhood, it does not even occur to Joe to use the authority of his age to bully Pip. On the contrary, Joe and Pip are, in Joe's words, "ever the best of friends" and in Pip's "equals" (pp. 78-80). The sense of equality with his interlocutor is, in fact, a basic precondition for the free flow of Joe's conversation. Confronted with the rigidly hierarchised social world of the upper classes, Joe's conversation dries up: he is literally struck dumb.

> "Oh!" she said to Joe, "You are the husband of the sister of this boy?"
> I could hardly have imagined dear old Joe looking so unlike himself or so like some extraordinary bird; standing as he did, speechless with his tuft of feathers ruffled, and his mouth open as if he wanted a worm.

> "You are the husband," repeated Miss Havisham,"of the sister of this boy?"
> It was very aggravating, but throughout the interview Joe persisted in addressing Me instead of Miss Havisham. (p.128).

Joe's utter incapacity to relate to the conventions of gentility raises major problems for Pip after he becomes a gentleman. It is not only that Joe is a reminder of Pip's lowly past, or that Pip often feels guilty for having to avoid Joe. What is more important is that each of Joe's encounters with Pip, are, in their unobtrusive way, critical and disconcerting. By his very uncomprehending presence — his inability to understand the hierarchising conventions of genteel society — Joe disrupts the smooth flow of genteel discourse, introduces confusions within its conventions of social interaction, breaks up the hierarchies without which the gentleman would lose his distinct identity.

> So, I presented Joe to Herbert, who held out his hand; but Joe backed from it, and held on to the bird's nest.
> "Your servant sir," said Joe, "which I hope as you and Pip" - here his eyes fell on the Avenger, who was putting some toast on the table, and so plainly denoted an intention to make that young gentleman one of the family, that I frowned it down and confused him even more - "I meantersay, you two gentlemen — which I hope you get your elths in this close spot? For the present may be a werry good inn, according to London opinion," said Joe confidentially "...but I wouldn't keep a pig in it myself — not in case I wish him to fatten wholesome and to eat with a meller flavour on him" (p.243)

The confusion into which Joe throws the conventions of gentility suggests the limits of those conventions, and more specifically their incapacity to accommodate the easy, affectionate, egalitarianism with which Joe relates to people. Significantly it is the unlettered Joe rather than Pip who recognises this:

> "Us two being now alone, sir," began Joe.
> "Joe", I interrupted pettishly, "how can you call me, sir?"
> Joe looked at me for a single instant with something faintly like reproach. Utterly preposterous as his cravat was, and as his collars were, I was conscious of a sort of dignity in that look. (pp244-5)

A past characterised by shared suffering, solidarity, easy spontaneous communication, makes Joe's mode of addressing Pip jarring, unfamiliar, unthinkable. But it is precisely at this jarring moment, which exposes itself as a raw nerve within Pip's comfortably adjusted relationship with gentlemanly society, that the world of Pip's past is made to enter into a critical contextualising relationship with his improving career — revealing it not simply as "progress" but also as something that is capable of destroying the deepest and most undemanding of personal relationships.

2.4 GENTLEMANLINESS AND LOVE

I tried to show in the earlier section how the conventions of gentility tend to be antagonistic to the informal, affectionate egalitarianism that underlies Joe's relationship with Pip. I want now to focus on the Pip-Estella relationships and to look at the genteel world from the inside, to judge whether or not it can, on its own terms, provide a context for the free development of the qualities that Pip associates with it before he embarks on his quest for gentlemanliness.

I hope that by this time you have read the text and will therefcre agree that Pip's aspiration for the gentlemanly world expresses not simply his snobbishness, but also his desire for a world of fine feelings and rich emotions. As a provincial boy Pip has no doubt about the imaginative richness of the world of gentlefolk.

> Whenever I watched the vessels standing out to the sea with their white sails spread, I somehow thought of Miss Havisham and Estella; and whenever the light struck aslant, far off, upon a cloud or sail or green hillside or water line it was just the same — Miss Havisham, Estella, and the strange house and the strange life appeared to have something to do with everything that was picturesque. (p.137).

Pip never really loses faith in this romantic vision. Late in the novel Pip reacts to Estella's impending marriage with the stupid and brutish Drummle, with an anguish that is not only alien to the measured formality of gentlemanly behaviour but also expresses the intensity with which Pip had hoped that an emotionally rich relationship with Estella would constitute the culminating point of his quest for improvement.

> You are part of my existence, part of myself. You have been in every line I have read, since I first came here, the rough common boy whose poor heart you wounded even then. You have been in every prospect I have ever seen since — on the river, on the sails of the ships, on the marshes, in the clouds, in the light, in the darkness, in the woods, in the sea, in the streets. You have been the embodiment of every graceful fancy that my mind has ever become acquainted with. (p.378).

The coldness with which Estella responds to Pip's impassioned outburst can be understood at one level, in terms of her personal upbringing. Brought up to wreak Miss Havisham's revenge on the male sex, Estella has been trained from childhood to steer clear of any deep emotional involvement. At the same time, however, it is impossible not to see the coincidence between Estella's personal predilections and the attitudes generated by the world that she inhabits. Estella's position as a lady, the deference that she constantly receives, envelops her in an atmosphere of "completeness and superiority" (p.58). Accordingly Estella's discourse is "undiscussable" (p.85), "authoritative" in Bakhtin's (I hope that you remember him), sense of the term. It is hard edged, complete in itself, incapable of registering another's voice, or of allowing other voices to enter into it. It does not allow other voices to create contradictions within it, animate it, and is incapable, in other words, of entering into the fertilising processes of interaction. Estella does not herself hesitate to confess as much:

> It seems," said Estella very calmly, "that there are sentiments, fancies — I don't know what you call them — which I am not able to comprehend. When you say that you love me I know what you mean as a form of words; but nothing more. You address nothing in my breast, you touch nothing there. I don't care for what you say at all". (p.376).

What is important here is not Estella's shortcomings or even that they are symptomatic of the genteel world as a whole but that Estella's immunity to "sentiments, fancies" is an indispensable precondition of the beauty, the poise, the elegance that had first attracted Pip to her, and to the gentlemanly world. Estella's very name brings together the idea of glittering brilliance with that of cold aloofness in an interdependent relationship, and Pip is always aware of the "air of

inaccessibility that her beauty gave her" (p.260). We might, in fact, go further and argue that in his depiction of the Pip-Estella relationship, Dickens seems to be hitting at the very roots of the genteel mystique. One important reason for the mid-Victorian English person's continuing fascination with the aristocracy was the air of romance that seemed to surround the aristocrats. "The aristocracy" says the social historian Geoffery Best, "was irresistably fascinating to a historically and hierarchically minded society, because its members seemed to be heroic. They were supposed to be handsome, love more passionately, and behave more impressively than lesser bred mortals." And in a first hand account of Count D'Orcy's manners and demeanour, a contemporary lists some of the qualities that made the refined gentleman seem romantic and superior.

> Count D'Orcy was a brilliant leader of the dandy class — strikingly handsome, of a splendid physique, a commanding appearance, an admirable horseman of the *Haute Ecole* school. When he appeared in the perfection of dress ... with the expression of self confidence and self complacency which the sense of superiority gives, he was observed by all .... What sentiment such an appearance might excite I cannot pretend to say, but at the same time the effect produced was unmistakable, they stared at him, as at a superior being.

But I hope that you will agree, keeping in mind the arguments that I have been offering, that in Dickens the "perfection of dress" and the capacity to love more passionately are revealed not as complementary but as contradictory categories, so that in *Great Expectations* the very qualities that go into the making of the genteel mystique become the means of their own demystification.

Note the portrait in the background and see the connection made between the notion of gentlemanliness and love

2.5 LET US SUM UP

Did you follow the argument in this unit? Let me quickly recapitulate the main points so that you can check out whether you've missed anything or not. I would suggest too that in case you come up against something in this summing up that you are not sure of, go back to the unit and check the relevant portion.

My first point in this unit was that *Great Expectations* makes the whole process of self-improvement problematic because unlike *David Copperfield* it does not provide the social context or milieu where the improving process might work itself out. Consequently, Pip's genuine desire to improve his lot comes up inevitably against the full blast of upper class arrogance. I had argued also that the conventional improvement plot is further problematised in *Great Expectations* because this novel violates a central (if repressed convention) essential for the smooth unfolding of the improvement plot: the repression of the hero's humble past after he becomes a gentleman. By contrast Dickens makes it impossible for Pip to reconcile the demands of gentlemanliness with the claims of his past. I hope that you followed the ways in which the human implications of this problem are worked out through the delineation of the Pip–Joe relationship. Finally in this unit we looked at the world of gentlefolk and its capacity to generate the fine feelings and rich emotions that Pip associates with it. At this level, we focussed on a particular relationship. Can you tell me what it was?

2.6 GLOSSARY

Betsy Trotwood — David's aunt in *David Copperfield*

Tommy Traddles — David's friend

Agnes — The person David marries after the death of his first wife.

Mealy Potatoes — A street urchin whom David got to know while working in the bottling factory.

Parody — humourous imitation of serious writing.

Hierarchy — organization of persons or things arranged into higher or lower ranks, classes, grades.

Dialogical — like a dialogue

Haute Ecole — A certain sophisticated style of horsemanship.

Ideology — a system of ideas that influences the views of the believer at every level.

Predicated — based on

Hegemonised — From the word hegemony which means the ability to ensure large scale confirmity to certain ideas without the application of force.

Mediated	Refracted
Inviolate	in its pure state.
Bonhomie	Good cheer, fellow feeling.
Subsumed	absorbed
Egalitarian	An attitude that is based on the belief that all men and women are equal
Interlocutor	The person spoken to.
Contextualising	To bring a problem in relation to the larger surrounding Problems.
Predilections	Special likings/preferences.
Demystification	To expose the methods by which certain people or institutions seek to disguise their real intentions by clothing these in appealing qualities.

2.7 QUESTIONS

1) Have you finished reading *David Copperfield*? If you have, try and compare David's progress with that of Pip. Do please add ideas of your own which you have not encountered in these units. May I also take this opportunity to add a few lines about the kind of answers that I would appreciate from someone who has been working with these units? I would probably feel happy and flattered to read an answer that uses the information given here accurately and appropriately. But the answer that I would *respect* would have to be one where the reader has taken into account what is given here, thought about it, used parts of it, but made whatever he or she has found useful here as part of his or her *distinctive* way of thinking. In other words what I am asking you to do is to use these units to generate your own thinking.

2) You will have gathered some ideas about Joe in the course of going through Unit 2. Supplement these with a close reading of the text and then attempt a three page answer on the significance of Joe *in Great Expectations*. By the way, by "close reading" I don't mean that you have to reread the whole text every time you sit down to write an answer. What I'm asking you to do is to focus only on the parts related to Joe, mark these out in your text, and have the text before you when get to work on your answer.

3) How do you respond to the Pip-Estella relationship? Again make use of your text while you write your answer.

4) In what way does Dickens complicate the conventional improvement plot? Think about this carefully and write a detailed five page answer.

UNIT 3 IMPROVEMENT OR DISINTEGRATION?

Structure

3.0 Objectives

3.1 Introduction

3.2 'The Progressive Educative Plot' and Self Integration

3.3 *Great Expectations* and the Integrative Method

3.4 Improvement or Disintegration? A Closer Look at Book 3

3.5 Let Us Sum Up

3.6 Glossary

3.7 Questions

3.0 OBJECTIVES

The aim of this Unit is to acquaint you with the ethos of "improvement" and to help you understand how *Great Expectations* highlights the contradictions within the ideal of "improvement" and gentility. After reading this Unit carefully, you will be able to explain how *Great Expectations* can be seen as a **bildungsroman.**

3.1 INTRODUCTION

I have been concerned so far with the sociological problems to which Dickens exposes the self improvement paradigm in *Great Expectations*, and how the self-helping individual is incorporated within the genteel ethos and with the ways in which this throws into doubt the desirability of "improvement" itself. But I feel that *Great Expectations* is more than a middle class indictment of (the predominantly aristocratic) notion of gentility. In fact it loosens the basic coordinates — the underlying epistemology — of what Peter Brooks calls "the progressive educative plot". More specifically I am going to try to show that if the traditional improvement plot is integrative in its orientation — aiming at the final integration of the hero's powers, *Great Expectations* projects the hero above all in terms of his "self-consciousness" his increasing awareness of the violent, often irreconcilable contradictions inherent to his situation.

3.2 "THE PROGRESSIVE EDUCATIVE PLOT" AND SELF INTEGRATION

The "progressive educative plot" is oriented above all towards the completion of the hero's education, so that in improvement literature the hero's final assimilation within

"good society" coincides with his acquisition of an integrated sense of self. At the simplest level this process is represented as linear, infallible, something that can be made to work itself out with the inevitability of objective science. Thus in Smiles's *Self Help* the practice of a few time tested virtues is shown to lead step by step to both success and what Betsy Trotwood calls "character". "What some men are," Samuel Smiles declared with the naïve confidence characteristic of many nineteenth century theories of progress, "all may without difficulty be. Employ the same means and the same results will follow".

The integrative orientation of self-improvement takes a more complex form in John Stuart Mill's *Autobiography*. Unlike Smiles's representation of Watt's career, for instance, the story of Mill's inner growth is based on a rupture – a psychological crisis in mid-life which forces him to review the values to which he had so far adhered. Nevertheless Mill's crisis never forces him to question the validity of self culture itself. On the contrary, from the vantage point of confident maturity (which point of view, incidentally determines the entire tone of the autobiography), Mill is able to perceive his crisis as "one of the successive phases" in the development of a mind "that was always pressing forward". In this sense Mill's crisis emerges as something that provides "complements and correctives" to the one-sided absorption in the life of the intellect, and enables him to join the cultivation of feelings with "intellectual culture". Joining and balance are, in fact, as Martin Warner points out, watchwords in an autobiography which conceptualises self-development as something where certain qualities can be added and complemented by others. Put another way, the cause and effect method *of Self Help* is replaced in Mill's *Autobiography* by what Warner calls the method of the "desiderated balance." This means that whereas in *Self-Help* "improvement" is a simple chain of related qualities, Mill's *Autobiography* brings together different and even opposite qualities in its projection of the fully rounded "balanced" consciousness. But in both cases, self culture is conceptualised as something that is successive, categorisable in additive terms, and leading to an integrated sense of self.

I went into this comparative analysis of *Self Help* and Mill's *Autobiography* because these two classic examples of nineteenth century improvement literature may be said to exemplify the two strands of progress — "outer" and "inner" — that came together in the English *bildungsroman* of the nineteenth century. More specifically, in the mainstream English *bildungsroman,* the hero is exposed to the kind of inner turmoil and subsequent emotional growth that is characteristic of Mill's *Autobiography*, but this process is also shown to be simultaneous with, and closely related to the kind of social advancement plotted in Smiles's parables. In *David Copperfield*, for example, David is made to confront a whole series of dangers and traumas but these are all along conceived of as aspects of his education — events whose underlying function is to contribute to David's all round development: to his acquisition on the one hand, of a completed, integrated sense of self, and on the other, of a comfortable, adjusted and productive relationship with society.

I will now try to show you how different Dickens's method had become as he moved from *David Copperfield* to *Great Expectations.*

3.3 *GREAT EXPECTATIONS* AND THE INTEGRATIVE METHOD

How does *Great Expectations* relate to the integrative method of the traditional *bildungsroman*? One good entry point into this problem is to turn our attention to Dickens's treatment of Miss Havisham — that crucial agent in the story of Pip's "progress". Like Betsy Trotwood, Miss Havisham's *function* is that of a

fairy godmother figures who ensure, (in the latter case supposedly ensures), the hero's entry into the world of culture and education, constitutes a violation of the classic Smilesean paradigm, which, as I am sure you will agree, is predicated on a strictly logical and material relationship between the hero's merit and his ultimate success. Yet, we could logically argue, couldn't we, that *David Copperfield* seems to reenact the middle class idea of improvement at the level of a wish-fulfilment fantasy, not only because the change that Betsy Trotwood brings about in David's life is a sort of magical reward for David's real desire to improve his lot; but also because she emerges as the novel's major spokesperson for the bourgeois virtues. Moreover, Betsy Trotwood's relationship with the fairytale is limited to her *function* as a magical donor. As an *individual* she is, despite her eccentricities, naturalised (especially after she ensures David's entry into the enlightened world of the middle class). What this does, I think, is to blunt the potentially disjunctive and traumatic implications of the sudden and absolute change that she brings about in David's fortunes. Instead the aura of homely familiarity that surrounds her makes David's entry into the respectable middle class world a smooth, easily negotiable process.

In *Great Expectations*, on the other hand, the fantastic is much more than a function of the plot. On the contrary, as in the grim folk tales we talked about in the first unit, the fantastic mode becomes a key element in what we might call a strategy of defamiliarisation: it distorts the figure of Miss Havisham herself, it creates around Satis House a weird atmosphere, and in the process makes Pip's first experience of the gentlemanly life strange and disconcerting. Thus Miss Havisham and the atmosphere that surrounds her, far from offering Pip an unambiguously desirable vision of the "good society", in fact provoke him, force on his consciousness the contradictory nature of the world of Satis House; arouse in him the first stirrings of the desire to emulate the cultured, refined, "fine" lifestyle, but at the same time profoundly disconcert him, leaving him not with a clear sense of purpose, but in a "disturbed and unthankful state" (p.101).

Do please read the long last sentence carefully again, because it leads up to the point that will turn out to be the crucial one in this unit. The point is this : situations in *Great Expectations* are organised not with the intention of affirming the hero's growth but of *testing* it. Incidents far from being milestones that chart the "seemly" step by step course of the hero's progress, are intentionally rendered extraordinary, forcing Pip to interact with people under unusual and unexpected conditions, provoking him. This method of composition impinges on a second major problem — that of characterisation. More specifically, I think that if in the conventional *bildungsroman,* the hero's character emerges out of a basically integrative process, (so that the experience to which he is exposed, even when painful, imparts solidity and stability to his final image) Pip is made to perceive the relationships into which he enters, or the social worlds through which he traverses as fundamentally, painfully contradictory. This means that Pip's experiences in general, far from adding up to an integrated sense of self, become in fact subjects of his introspection or in Bakhtin's terms, of his "self consciousness". We might thus say that it is Pip's painful grappling with the contradictions to which he is so relentlessly exposed, rather than any steady inner development of the self, that constitutes what Pip calls "the innermost life of my life"(p.247).

In *Great Expectations* Dickens uses a whole range of techniques to expose Pip to the burden of his introspection, his "self consciousness" — his sense of the contradictoriness of his situation. But it is above all how Dickens uses the "disclosure" on which the whole plot of *Great Expectations* depends, that he is able to create the conditions that can sustain the most ruthless dismantling of Pip's sense of self. But what do I mean by "disclosure"? In fact I've borrowed the term from the French critic Roland Barthes. According to Barthes the disclosure in the "realistic" novel, finally sorts out the unaccounted for problems within the story, but by doing

this it also enables the novel to naturalise its projection of an integrated, "completed" sense of reality.

The disclosure, then, is the revelation in the light of which everything falls into place. It is something that gives moral and logical coherence to the whole story. From a perspective that is concerned with the hero, the discovery is constituted as the point when the "wandering" hero finally "arrives". So what would you say is the disclosure in *Great Expectations*? Surely Pip's discovery at the end of Book 2 that his gentlemanly status has all along been sustained by a criminal's money. But what does this disclosure do? Far from closing the story of Pip's growth, it exposes him to a great crisis — makes it impossible for him to either belong to gentlemanly society or to go back to the provincial world of his past. It assaults his very sense of selfhood. What is more, by locating the disclosure at the end of the second part of the novel, Dickens can leave for himself the entire third part in which to carry out a sustained analysis of the "improving" consciousness. Especially at the point of its maximum vulnerability.

3.4 IMPROVEMENT OR DISINTEGRATION?: A CLOSER LOOK AT BOOK 3 OF *GREAT EXPECTATIONS*

If you've read Book 3 of *Great Expectations* carefully, you've probably been struck by the feverish atmosphere in which it is enveloped: by the sheer number of sensational incidents that seem to clutter it. Yet all this probably seemed to you particularly meaningless if you were reading from the point of view of plot, because of course the secret on which the whole plot turns is, as we saw earlier, disclosed at the end of Book 2. Yet if we turn our attention from plot to the problem of characterisation, Book 3 begins to make a lot of sense because more than any other portion of the novel, Book 3 provides the ground where the integrative method of the conventional *bildungsroman* can be systematically dismantled.

Everything in the third part of the novel — the long, exhausting and seemingly purposeless journeys that Pip is so relentlessly made to undertake, the whirlwind pace at which he is hurtled from one traumatic experience to another, all aim at depriving rather than offering Pip the "comfort of civilization" — the sense of belonging to a wider community that critic Franco Moretti identifies as the underlying essence of the English *bildungsroman*. Instead of arriving at a comfortable relationship with society, Pip's situation is characterised by an overwhelming sense of homelessness; instead of integrating his powers Pip finds himself pushed to the very brink of extinction.

It is the evocation of Pip's homelessness that gives an underlying significance to the long and seemingly unconnected sequence of events that begins with Estella's announcement of her impending marriage to the stupid and brutish Drummle and ends with Pip's restless night at the Hummums. Deeply distressed by Estella's decision, Pip decides to walk back all the way from Kent to London, on the assumption that "I could do nothing half so good to myself as tire myself out"(p.379). He reaches home long after midnight, physically and mentally exhausted only to receive a mysterious note at the gate. The note is from Wemmick and it instructs Pip: "PLEASE READ THIS HERE' and 'DON'T GO HOME (p.379). As an element in a suspense plot, Wemmick's note is totally unnecessary: the danger against which Wemmick warns Pip turns out to be a contrived one, and Wemmick's intervention makes no difference at all to either Magwitch's or Pip's fate. But by preventing the exhausted Pip from entering his own home, Wemmick's injunction becomes an integral aspect of Pip's self-consciousness. As he lies awake in the oppressive inn where he is forced to spend the night, Wemmick's note "plaits" itself around Pip's

consciousness as "a bodily pain would have" (p.380) until it is transformed from a simple fact to a "vast shadowy verb"(p.380) which expresses the central reality about Pip's present existence.

> Even when I thought of Estella, and how we parted that day for ever, and when I recalled all the circumstances of our parting, and all her looks and tones, and the action of her fingers while she knitted — even then I was pursuing here, there and everywhere the caution 'Don't go home'. When at last I dozed, in sheer exhaustion of mind and body, it became a vast shadowy verb which I had to conjugate. Imperative mood present tense: Do not thou go home, — potentially : I may not, cannot go home, and I might not, could not, would not and should not go home; until I felt I was going distracted, and rolled over on the pillow. (p.381)

In Pip's nightmarish encounter with Orlick, which follows soon after, Dickens's destabilising project implicates Pip's sense of self itself. (If you don't have this particular episode in your head go back to the text and read it before you proceed further.) In one of the earliest reviews of *Great Expectations,* Mrs. Oliphant a contemporary writer angrily complained that the Orlick affair constituted "the most arbitrary and causeless stoppage in the story", and at one level she was perfectly right. Like Wemmick's warning, the Orlick episode adds nothing to the plot, and it may be read simply as a sensational diversion. As an aspect of Dickens's overall strategy of destabilisation, however, the Pip-Orlick encounter is an almost perfect piece of artistic construction. Every detail leading up to Pip's entrapment, every element in the atmosphere that envelops the sluice house where Pip is imprisoned, pushes Pip's quest for improvement to the point of complete collapse. The circumstances leading up to Pip's capture expose him to the appalling possibility of dying without the benefit of a last explanation, of leaving behind for posterity, an image of himself bereft of the last vestiges of integrity. In these circumstances, Pip perceives his impending death not just as physical dissolution, but as the culminating point of a whole process of disintegration, expressive of the essential reality that underlies "a blind and thankless life" (p.410). If you have gone through the Orlick portion carefully you will remember that a recurring motif throughout the Pip-Orlick encounter is "the sluggish, stifling" (p.433) smoke that emanates from the lime kiln in the neighbourhood of the sluicehouse where Pip is trapped. Orlick intends to dispose off Pip's corpse in the lime kiln : "I won't have a rag of you, I won't have a bone of you left on earth. I'll put your body in the kiln — and let people suppose what they may of you, they shall never know nothing" (p.436). The prospect of disappearing without a trace, of being "changed" (p.438) into the utterly insubstantial lime kiln smoke brings the story of Pip's maturation to the edge of nothingness.

If there is anything that gives a semblance of purpose to Pip's "lost" life it is ironically his transgressive resolution to help his criminal benefactor evade the law. Moreover in Herbert, Pip has a friend capable of responding not only to his deepest problems but also to the inner integrity of his decision to help Magwitch. However when Herbert leaves for the West Indies Pip feels "that my last anchor was loosening" (p.470). Bereft of everything that might have imparted stability to his sense of self, it is impossible for Pip to think in the balancing additive terms characteristic of the improving mind. Instead Pip's mental condition is best expressed in the delirium that overtakes him:

> Whether I was really down in Garden-Court in the dead of night, groping about for the boat that was supposed to be there; whether I had two or three times come to myself on the staircase with great terror, not knowing how I had got out of bed; whether I had found myself lighting the lamp, possessed by the idea that he was coming up the stairs, and the lights were blown out; whether I had been inexpressibly harrassed by the distracted talking,

> laughing and groaning, of someone ... whether there had been a closed iron furnace in a dark corner of the room, and a voice had called out over and over again that Miss Havisham was consuming within it; these things I tried to settle with myself and get into some order, as I lay that morning in bed. But the vapour of lime kiln would come between me and them, disordering them all .... (pp. 470-71).

Of course Pip's delirious state is abnormal and temporary, the consequence of serious illness. But at a deeper level, Pip's illness not only suggests his profoundly disturbed mental state but also approximates a compositional method that underlies the entire third part of *Great Expectations*. Within this compositional method (as in Pip's delirium), time does not move in its ordinary, everyday, "realistic" pace: instead it is organised as "crisis time", hurtling Pip, at a feverish pace, from one extreme situation to another. Again Pip's imagined journeys at "the head of stairs, running down stairs", approximate the breakdown of the habitable, confortable interiors that had enveloped Pip in the second part of the novel. It also gives way in the third part, to the restless journeys, one night stopovers at oppressive inns, murderous appointments. In this sense, Dickens's delineation of Pip's delirium may be read as paradigmatic of a compositional method that aims not at integration but at "disordering".

It is true of course that in the concluding pages of *Great Expectations,* Dickens makes a last-minute attempt to rehabilitate Pip and to integrate his life to the unostentatious, productive middle class world. Indeed in Pip's resurrection we might see one more instance of the process by which official ideologies are both criticised and incorporated in the Dickensian text, but for one, obviously disturbing fact. The money that buys Herbert's partnership at Clarriker's firm, and secures for Pip his stable Smilesian identity — "I work pretty hard for a sufficient living, and therefore — yes I do well." (p.492) and indeed, enables Dickens to set into motion the whole process by which the values of the traditional *bildungsroman* can be partially retrieved, is, in fact, the same tainted money that had precipitated the crisis in Pip's life in the first place.

3.5 LET US SUM UP

In this Unit, I have been concerned above all with Dickens's use in *Great Expectations* of a compositional method which aims at loosening the coordinates that sustained the integrative orientation of the improvement plot. I have tried to show you first of all how the classic nineteenth century *bildungsroman* may be said to synthesise the process of inner and outer growth as it is articulated in extra novelistic texts like *Self Help* and Mill's *Autobiography*. We have then seen how Dickens uses various devices such as expressive modes of the fairytale that make Pip's first experience of gentility a disconcerting experience, or a disclosure that precipitates rather than resolves the crisis. Finally we focussed on the third part of the novel with its restless journey, one night stop overs at inhospitable inns and delirious illnesses all of which embody a compositional method that aims not at integration but at disordering.

3.6 GLOSSARY

Ethos — the characteristic spirit of a people or an institution – or distinctive features of a particular culture or group.

Bildungsroman — a novel whose theme is the growth and development of the hero – literally, education novel.

Paradigm	pattern, example
Roland Barthes	author of *S/Z*
Denouement	the solution of a plot in a story.
Sarrasin	A novella by the French writer Balzac.
Plenitude	fullness, completeness
Franco Moretti	author of *The Way of the World. The Bildungsroman In European Culture* (1987)
Dissolution	Disintegration
Transgressive	breaking a law, command or duty.
Coordinates	the elements whose interrelationship makes up the system of thought
Epistemology	the internal method by which any system of thought Works.
Irreconcilable	Utterly contradictory.
Infallible	something that never fails.
Disjunctive	Disruptive — oriented towards breaking up.
Additive	A method that is based on arriving at the whole by simply adding up the different parts.

3.7 QUESTIONS

1) I think that if you've read these units as well as the text carefully you should be in a position to attempt a full length answer on *Great Expectations* as a *bildungsroman*. May I take this opportunity to suggest how you can use this material provided here in order to build your answer? Of course you need not abide by the plan I provide below. In fact as I said in the previous unit the answer that I would most value would be one that takes into account what I say but also shows evidence that you have been thinking on your own about the problem.

I would begin any answer on *Great Expectations* as a *bildungsroman* by discussing why the improvement plot that underlies the *bildungsroman* would have particular relevance to the 1850s and 60s, but also how there were certain internal contradictions within the popular improvement plots. Within the introduction itself I would also try to delineate the integrative method of the classic nineteenth century *bildungsroman* by referring not only to *David Copperfield* but also to *Self Help* and Mill's *Autobiography*.

Having laid out the basic framework within which the English *bildungsroman* articulated itself, I would go on to use material from Unit 2 to show how *Great Expectations* exposes deep rooted human problems within a pattern of

"improvement" that has gentlemanliness as its ultimate aim. Similarly I would draw on material from unit 3 to show how by precipitating the disclosure at the end of the second part of the book, Dickens lays the ground for the working out of a compositional method that is aimed not at integration but at disordering.

I would conclude my answer by suggesting that this destabilisation of the improvement plot symptomises a bigger problem: the unsustainability of self improvement in a society where progress is, in fact, inseparable from everything that is its opposite. (I will take up this problem in greater detail in Unit 5).

2) "Part 3 of *Great Expectations* is the least relevant section of *Great Expectations*." Would you agree? Give a reasoned answer.

3) A great deal of what I have said in Unit 3 is adapted from the second and fourth chapters of a book that Bakhtin (remember him?) wrote called *The Problems of Dostoyevsky's Poetics*. *Dostoyevsky's Poetics* is one of the great books of literary criticism and its applicability goes way beyond what I have done with it. Can you read at least the two chapters I mentioned of Bakhtin's book (it is easily available) and make a summary of its main points?

UNIT 4 *GREAT EXPECTATIONS* AND THE FAIRYTALE

Structure

4.0 Objectives

4.1 Introduction

4.2 The Fairytale as a Historically Complex Mode

4.3 "Realism" and the Fairytale

4.4 "Deforming" the Conventional Fairytale

4.5 Let Us Sum Up

4.6 Glossary

4.7 Questions

4.0 OBJECTIVES

The nineteenth century has often been called the "age of realism". Yet within the so called realistic novel elements of the gothic, the romantic, the fairytale etc. could be found. Especially in Dickens, who drew upon several popular modes. After reading this Unit, you will be able to outline how the conventions of the fairytale have been worked into *Great Expectations*.

4.1 INTRODUCTION

I hope that you remember the point I had made (in Unit 1) about the formal open endedness of the Dickensian novel and about its ability to absorb a whole range of popular modes. I'd suggested also that one popular mode that had a great deal of relevance for *Great Expectations* was the fairytale. In this unit, I will try to show you the complex (and therefore interesting) ways in which elements from the fairytale (at various points of its evolution) get "reactivated" in *Great Expectations*.

4.2 THE FAIRYTALE AS A HISTORICALLY COMPLEX MODE

Before I go into what I have to say about the relationship between *Great Expectations* and the fairytale, I would like you to be aware of a fairly influential body of opinion that sees the fairytale like - quality of Dickens's fiction as symptomatic of its moral simplicity. For instance, Franco Moretti has argued (in his influential book on the European *bildungsroman*) that *Great Expectations* is, like many other novels that Dickens wrote, deep down a fairytale. Moretti compares this

feature of the Dickensian novel unfavourably, against the mature realism of nineteenth century European fiction, and argues that Dickens's novels are basically infantile because they are predicated on a fairytale - like division of their world into good and evil. But the only evidence that Moretti offers for arguing that fairytales are necessarily infantile is a quotation from Bruno Bettleheim:

> Ambiguities must wait until a relatively firm personality has been established ... The figures in a fairytale are not ambivalent — not good and bad at the same time, as we are in reality. But since polarisation dominates the child's mind, it also dominates the fairytales .... One brother is stupid the other is clever. One sister is virtuous and industrious the other is vile and lazy .... One parent is good, the other evil.

It must be remembered, however, that Bettleheim was focusing on fairytales in their *contemporary* form, and on their ability to illustrate how a child's mind works. Understandably, therefore, Bettleheim's concern was not primarily historical : he did not take into account, for instance, that fairytales were not always part of what is now called "children's literature". Nor does he say that it was precisely during the early nineteenth century, that is, during Dickens's formative years, that fairytales were moving away from their roots in popular oral culture to children's books. Rooted in a "preliterate peoples way of thinking", fairytales in the eighteenth and even the early nineteenth century, often represented, as Robert Darnton and more recently Herman Rebel have shown, the ways in which "the poor and not so poor continue to speak to each other and to subvert official efforts at replacing popular speech with the rote learning of catechisms and approved texts." Such stories derived their power from the sombreness of their atmosphere, their discontinuous prose, their occasionally brutal language, and above all, from the way that they use the magical elements inherent within fairytales as the means not of providing simplified moral resolutions, but of confronting their readers with disconcerting paradoxes and desperate choices. Rebel shows that when the Grimms began to prepare the vast body of fairytales for publication, they systematically edited out material unsuitable for children on the assumption that it was not "the tales' authenticity but the pleasure that they brought that would allow them to function as works of instruction." Incorporated within the moral economy of respectability, the printed fairytale began increasingly to acquire the pleasant atmosphere and the simplified morality that we associate with it today.

I hope that you can see how the historical complexity that Rebel's essay brings to bear on the fairytale shows up the reductiveness of analyses (such as Moretti's) that treat the fairytale-like quality of the Dickensian novel as expressive of an infantile imagination that can work only by dividing the world into good and bad. On the contrary, poised at a critical point of its evolution when Dickens first encountered it, the fairytale mode opened for England's greatest popular writer the novelistic possibilities inherent in its past and in its future. It enabled him to appropriate the disjunctive force of its original form, and at the same time to replicate perhaps, but also to "deform" — a term that I will explain in greater detail soon — the simple bipolar (good-bad) structure that it was beginning to acquire. I will try to show later that the story of Pip's expectations replicates in order to subvert the conventional novelisations of the fairytale plots, and that the binary worldview that the fairytale plot sustains is, in *Great Expectations*, shown to epitomise not just a childish mode of cognition, but also the way that official society seeks to preserve its own sanctity.

4.3 "REALISM" AND THE FAIRYTALE

Let me begin by exploring the ways in which elements from the older, darker, "folk" form of the fairytale enter into and affect *Great Expectations*, and especially the pivotal scenes involving Satis House and their weird owner.

If you've read the Satis House scenes carefully you will agree that these scenes retain the sombre atmosphere and all the disconcerting force that Rebel associates with the fairytale in its original form. What is more the Satis House scenes are described almost entirely from the point of view of Pip who is at this stage a poor labouring boy. We might thus say that Dickens brings into the domain of the novel a mode of representing the elite that is inextricably implicated in a plebian point of view. If you keep this in mind you will perhaps agree that the truly interesting problem is not the childlikeness or otherwise of the fairytale mode that Dickens uses of the Satis House scenes, but its relationship to a mode of novel that was through the 1860s being associated with the educated classes of what one contemporary described as a "scientific and somewhat sceptical age". For the lack of a more precise term we might describe this method as "realism" and one of its tenets was that it self-consciously rejected what the *Westminster Review* (one of the most important organs of educated opinion) described as "the marvels which had delighted our cruder ancestors".

I have no doubt that by now you have reached a stage in your development as a student of literature where you can deal with the following proposition: that realism is not an unmediated expression of the "real" or an extension of "truth" or "nature", but a certain mode of artistic ordering (or artistic construction of you like). As Roland Barthes argues in his well known analysis of Balzac's description of the wealthy *de Lanty* mansion, the "effect" of reality is an illusion created by the surreptitious orchestration of "connotations" (or the additional bits of meaning that cling to the author's language over and above what it literally states). Now let me quote the relevant passage from Barthes. It is a difficult passage and I will try to help you along as you read it by interpolating explanations within square brackets. Don't give up grappling with it, because this passage has wide-ranging applicability:

> The fleeting citation, this surreptitious and discontinuous way of stating themes, ... create together the *allure* of connotation; the seems [roughly, the *system*, of additional meanings concealed beneath the regular meaning of words] seem to appear to float freely, to form a galaxy of trifling data in which we read no order of importance: the narrative technique is impressionistic: it breaks up the signifier [that is it breaks up the word from something that signifies a single simple meaning] into particles of verbal matter [connotations] which makes sense by only coalescing .... The touch must be light as though it were not worth remembering, and yet appearing again another guise, it must already be a memory; the readerly [or the realistic] is an effect based on operations of solidarity [the readerly sticks]; but the more that this solidarity is renewed, the more intelligible (it) becomes .... The (ideological) goal of this technique is naturalising meaning [that is to say rather than acknowledge that the novel's reality is an effect based on the orchestration of words and their connotations, this technique pretends that words are a transparency that reveal an preexisting reality] .... This naturalisation is possible only because the significant data released — or summoned — in a homeopathic rhythm are borne along by a purportedly "natural" medium language: connotation is concealed beneath the regular sound of sentences, "wealth" [Barthes is referring to Balzac's description of the splendid *de Lanty* mansion] beneath the utterly natural syntax [subject adverbial object] which says that a party is given in a mansion which is located in a particular neighbourhood.

Barthes's insistence on the constructedness of novelistic "truth" has been the subject of extended and critical commentary. What interests me, however, is not whether or not reality in the novel is purely an "effect" but the suggestion that realism is formally implicated in what it seeks to describe. Let me elaborate a bit on this by

turning to the following passage from *Mansfield Park* which like most of Jane Austen's writing exemplifies perfectly the methods of domestic realism.

> To the education of her daughters Lady Bertram paid not the smallest attention. She had not time for such cares. She was a woman who spent her days in sitting nicely dressed on a sofa, doing some long piece of needlework, of little use and no beauty, thinking more of her pug than of her children, but very indulgent to the latter when it did not put her to inconvenience, guided in everything important by Sir Thomas, and in smaller concerns by her sister.

Now, it is clear, of course, that Jane Austen's attitude to the person she is describing is extremely critical. But I hope that you will agree that Jane Austen wouldn't dream of disrupting the system of connotations which produces this internally integrated, directly experienced "authentic" picture of the domestic world of the gentry in the late eighteenth century, in order to articulate her criticism. For example, Austen would never have an angel descend from heaven, walk into *Mansfield Park* and point out to Lady Bertram that she leads a lazy, parasitic life, because by doing this she would destroy forever the effect of the natural that she has built word by word.

Moreover you'd agree, wouldn't you, that the signs – for example Lady Bertram's lazy posture, the quality of the embroidery that she is working at and her attitude towards her children, the dresses she might wear or the way she speaks – that go into the making of Lady Bertram's image — have to preserve a certain degree of consistency. For as Barthes insists, the sense of reality is created when connotations concealed beneath the simple meaning of words, supplement each other and, come together in "operations of solidarity".

It is the consensus of signs - for example, a certain internal consistency between the social class to which a character belongs, the kind of dress that she wears, and the way that she speaks— that the fairytale mode seeks to disrupt. It frees the signifier from the need to replicate "life as it is"; and by disregarding the requirements of "lifelikeness" which give to realistic representations of upper class homes both their authenticity and their internal homogeneity, it creates in Satis House a site where the attributes of an elegant lifestyle can be tensely juxtaposed against death, decay and madness. "The rich materials" — "satins, lace and silk" — in which Miss Havisham is dressed; the bridal flowers in her dress, the jewels that lie sparkling on her table suggest the resplendent celebrations of the rich and the cultured. But adds Pip, "everything that ought to have been white was white long ago, and had lost its lustre and was faded and yellow and the bride within the bridal dress had withered like the dress, and like the flowers, had no brightness but the brightness of her sunken eyes" (p.87).

In Dickens's novelisation of the fairytale then signs lose their stability: far from "fixing" reality in black and white terms, signifiers in the Satis House scenes carry within themselves the possibility of their own reversal (for example, as we just saw a signifier such as Miss Havisham's wedding dress suggests both celebration and decay). The effect of this is that it becomes impossible for Pip (and for the reader) to take the superiority of the gentlefolk for granted. Miss Havisham's bridal clothes are also like her "grave clothes" (p.90), and Miss Havisham's birthday, wedding day, and dying day all come together when, during the course of a grotesque birthday ritual, Miss Havisham imagines her corpse laid out where her wedding feast should have taken place:

> "When the ruin is complete", she said with a ghastly look, "and when they lay me dead, in my bride's dress in my bride's table — which shall be done, and will be the finished curse upon him — so much the better if it is done on this day." (p.117).

In *Great Expectations* the fairytale mode breaks "the homeopathic rhythm" by which the system of secondary (connotative) meanings are brought together to constitute the "real". It renders as strange and alien what domestic realism would seek to represent as familiar and internally integrated. Retaining the subversive charge and the painful ambiguities inherent in its original form, the fairytale mode in *Great Expectations* enables us to see the world of the elite from a new plebian point of view, and it does so only because it breaks free from the hegemony of the ways in which those with access to power and education represent that world.

4.4 "DEFORMING" THE CONVENTIONAL FAIRYTALE

What makes Dickens's relationship with the fairytale mode truly interesting is his access to both the "folk" form of the fairytale, as well as to the morally simpler, more formulaic plot pattern that it was acquiring through the nineteenth century. Unlike a novel like *Oliver Twist* which uses devices from the conventional fairytale to provide simplified moral solutions to the problems raised by other aspects of the novel, *Great Expectations* absorbs the conventional fairytale plot, not in order to replicate its simple oppositional paradigm but in order to "deform" it. The Russian Formalists (the group of critics who first developed the idea of "deformation") thought of deformation as variations that individual authors brought about in certain well-known plot patterns in order to achieve their distinctive efffect. But I think that it was Bakhtin who gave the term its larger resonance when he argued that the most effective forms of deformation were "based on certain displacements and recombinations of semantic values [such that] a transfer of ideological values occurs." In *Great Expectations* the process of deformation — when we understand it in Bakhtin's extended sense — involves a head-on assault on the very structure of expectations formalised in the conventional fairytale plot.

One way in which we can respond to the complexity that underlies the relationship between the conventional fairytale plot and *Great Expectations* is by turning once again to the figure of Miss Havisham — this time to her *function* as the supposed fairy godmother in the fairytale-like plot of Pip's expectations. As the benign agent who supposedly ensures Pip's elevation to "good" society, Miss Havisham is obviously and genealogically connected to the innumerable fairy godmother/father figures who appear in Dickens's early novels. At the same time it is equally obvious that Miss Havisham, in all her weirdness, is not a simple reincarnation of Betsy Trotwood, for example.

This ambiguity lies at the heart of Dickens's conceptualisation of Miss Havisham, rendering her in Pip's eyes, as both fairy godmother and witch. When Pip visits Satis House for the first time after the great change in his fortunes, Miss Havisham's crutch — a symbol of her deformity — becomes at the same time a signifier of her benign magical powers, and Miss Havisham in her role as fairygodmother is juxtaposed against her rotting wedding cake in a configuration pregnant with the tension of its own contradictions:

> "This is a gay figure, Pip", said she, making her crutch stick play around me, as if she the fairy godmother who had changed me, were bestowing the finishing gift — and so I left my fairy godmother, with both her hands on her crutch stick, standing in the midst of the dimly lighted room beside the rotting bridecake that was hidden in cobwebs. (pp.183-84).

The ambiguity with which Dickens represents the figure of Miss Havisham influences our anticipation of Pip's future. At one level Pip's assumption that Miss

Havisham is his fairy godmother prompts Pip (and us) to read his future with the "eyes of the genre" (that is, from the point of view of the conventional fairytale) that Miss Havisham apparently sets into motion. Assuming that Miss Havisham is his secret benefactor, Pip speculates:

> She had adopted Estella and she had as good as adopted me, and it could not fail to be her intention to bring us together. She reserved it for me to restore the desolate house, admit the sunshine into the dark rooms, set the clocks a going and the cold hearths ablazing, tear down the cobwebs, destroy the vermin — in short do all the shining deeds of the young Knight of romance and marry the Princess. (p.253).

Designed and etched by George Cruikshank

The important thing here is not Pip's mistake, but that it recreates the fairytale plots of Dickens's early novels arousing in us expectations of a "solution" that will, on the one hand, manage, resolve or repress the problematic nature of Pip's relationship with Miss Havisham, and, on the other, create in *Great Expectations* the simple bipolar world of *Oliver Twist* where an idealised realm inhabited by Miss Havisham and Estella can be split off structurally from the sordidness of the real world. It is this binary world view that serves as the shared ground, "the common knowledge" against which the story of Pip's actual career is made to "sound". In this sense the series of revelations that link Miss Havisham to the criminal Compeyson, and bind both Pip and Estella inextricably to the sordid almost sub-human figure of Magwitch, make the act of deforming the conventional fairytale plot simultaneous with the smashing of the basic moral boundary by which Pip (and indeed the larger gentlemanly society of which he is a part) preserves his/its sanctity.

4.5 LET US SUM UP

I do very much that hope this unit opened up for you some new ways of looking at popular forms such as the fairytales. Popular forms as you saw in this unit don't exist outside of history: they too are subject to change. In this Unit, we have seen how *Great Expectations* intersects with the fairytale at a point when it was being uprooted from the grim world of the European peasantry and becoming incorporated within the economy of children's literature. This meant that *Great Expectations* could absorb and at the same time transform both the grim, disconcerting atmosphere of the traditional folk tale, and the simple bipolar (good/bad) structure that it was beginning to acquire. As we have seen in this Unit, this is exactly what *Great Expectations* does. It appropriates the grim atmosphere of the traditional fairytale as well as its magical elements to make Pip's first exposure to gentility a strange and difficult experience. On the other hand, we have discussed how *Great Expectations* replicates the plot of the pleasanter, children's version of the fairytale only in order to "deform" it. Do you think that you can recapitulate how Dickens goes about doing this? If you can't, look up the relevant portion.

4.6 GLOSSARY

Grimms	Two brothers from Germany who were among the first to collect folk tales, leave out from these the harsh elements, and then print them as pleasant stories for children.
Interpolate	to put in
Impressionistic	based on impressions rather than on knowledge
Coalescing	growing together or writing so as to form one group or mass
Balzac	One of the greatest French novelists of the 19th century.
Semiotic	the study of signs in general especially as they are related To language
Signifier	A sign (for example the word in a language).
Signified	The meaning that is conventionally attached to a sign.
Semantic	meaning in language.
Conceptualize	to form a general idea or understanding of something
Bipolar	having two poles.
Preliterate	People who have not yet had the chance to gain education.
Cathechisms	moral lessons (usually lessons from the Bible).
Reductiveness	The inability to take into account the full significance of a situation.

Juxtaposed	set up against.
Domestic realism	A form of novel writing that offers closely observed accounts of what goes on inside families.
Subvert	undermine
Genealogically	related by genes

4.7 QUESTIONS

1) Write a note on Herman Rebel's historical analysis of the fairytale.

2) Summarise in your own words Barthes's analysis of realism. Look up the relevant section if necessary.

3) Define "the reality effect", "deformation".

4) Write a full length answer on the importance of the fairytale mode in *Great Expectations*.

UNIT 5 CRIME AND RESPECTABILITY

Structure

5.0 Objectives

5.1 Introduction

5.2 Dickens and Crime

5.3 The Respectable and the Criminal in *Great Expectations*

5.4 Criminal Wealth and Respectability

5.5 Let Us Sum Up

5.6 Glossary

5.7 Questions

5.8 Suggested Readings

5.0 OBJECTIVES

After reading this Unit carefully you will be able to:

- explain the shift that occurs in Dicken's attitude to crime; and
- outline the relationship between respectability and criminality.

5.1 INTRODUCTION

In the earlier unit, we saw that the "deformation" of the fairytale plot in *Great Expectations* consisted of belying the reader's assumptions that Miss Havisham is Pip's secret benefactress. At the same time we saw that the sensational revelation that Pip's gentlemanly status is based on a criminal's wealth implicates Pip and his progress no longer seems innocent. The problem of crime was a lifelong preoccupation with Dickens, and in this unit I plan to explore the complex relationship that Dickens charts in *Great Expectations* between that highly moralised category — "respectability" — and its criminalised "other".

5.2 DICKENS AND CRIME

The problem of crime was a lifelong preoccupation with Dickens's and some of the most fascinating of his early writing has to do with criminality. I cannot here enter into anything like a comprehensive analysis of the ways in which the young Dickens negotiated the problem of crime, but I need to make two points because these help to throw into relief certain transformations that take place in Dicken's attitude to crime

as he moves from his early to his late phase. The **first** is that criminality in Dickens's early fiction is often embodied in figures who are individually fascinating — figures like Quilp — who testify to the young Dickens's interest in the dark repressed world of violence, crime and guilt but who are nevertheless projected as **aberrations**. Thus Quilp, who may be said in a very real sense to dominate the world of *The Old Curiosity Shop*, is a dwarf who has very strange habits. **Second**, when criminality is related to a social milieu, this milieu is often demarcated structurally from the sphere of respectability. Thus Fagin's criminality in *Oliver Twist* is inseparable from his existence in the sordid world of slums, and while the threat that he poses to respectable society is very real, it is impossible to conceive of Fagin as part of this society. We might therefore say that in Dickens's early fiction, crime, whether it is located in the psychotic individual or in the poverty ridden landscape of the "other" London, is never allowed to infiltrate the processes of respectability.

In Dickens's later fiction, however, the relationship between criminality and respectability undergoes a major change. Far from being located in the margins of respectable society, criminality becomes integral to it. In *Little Dorrit*, for example, crime is located in the heart of official England, in the most advanced forms of its economic activity and in the behavior of its ruling elite. In *Great Expectations* this theme of criminality in respectability is taken even further.

5.3 THE RESPECTABLE AND THE CRIMINAL IN *GREAT EXPECTATIONS*

At first glance respectability in *Great Expectations* does seem to emerge as an internally consistent social sphere whose inner sanctity is preserved by the arbitration of a legal machinery always capable of isolating criminality, and by a whole system, of signs and representations dissociating it from the everyday processes of society. The two convicts who travel with Pip during his journey to Kent compel and receive attention not because they have committed heinous offences, but because they are an "Exhibition" — "their ironed legs", their "coarse, mangy, ungainly outer surfaces", marking them off socially, culturally and even biologically from the respectable members of society. In *Great Expectations*, the effects of such penal branding are of course most visible in the figure of Magwitch. "The very grain of the man," as Pip puts it, proclaims "a Prisoner, Bondman, plain as plain could be" (pp.352-53). Moreover, Magwitch is closely associated with Australia — that "thief colony" whose dystopian cultural connotations have been detailed in Robert Hughes's *The Fatal Shore*. Let me explain here that "dystopian" is the opposite of utopian. So dystopian would mean hellish Separated from England by a wall "14,000 miles thick", inhabited by her "excrementitious mass", "spinning forever at the outer rim of the world, in ever worsening moral darkness", Australia was, in the Victorian imagination, "a cloaca, invisible, its contents filthy and unnameable". In this sense, Magwitch is the inscrutable "other" of Victorian respectability. The 'other' then is the criminal who inhabits the dark, incomprehensible domain outside "respectability" — somebody in whose being every fantasy about crime can be contained. To Pip, Magwitch might be guilty of "I knew not of what crimes" (p.34).

Yet Magwitch's public status as a hardened criminal, capable of committing every offence is not, in fact, borne by the details of his career. These details are supplied by Magwitch himself in his long account of his early life to Pip:

> "I was took up, took up, took up, to that extent I reg'larly growed up took up. This was the way it was when I was a ragged little creetur as much to be pitied as I ever see ... I got the nameof being hardened. Tramping, begging, thieving, working sometimes, when I could — though that warn't as often as

> you might think, till you put the question would you ha'been overready to give me work yourselves — a bit of a poacher, a bit of a labourer, a bit of a waggoner, a bit of a haymaker, a bit of a hawker, a bit of most things that don't pay and lead to trouble, I got to be a man. (p.361).

What is important here is not the seriousness of Magwitch's offences — Magwitch's offences, before he falls into the clutches of the gentlemanly Compeyson do not in fact extend beyond the occasional theft — but that Magwitch is the inevitable target of punishment. Born in the lowest stratum of society, under the constant surveillance of the law, exposed constantly to prison terms, and consequently forced into the circuits of delinquency — "Trampling, begging, thieving, working sometimes" — Magwitch's career illustrates how penal techniques in *Great Expectations* aim not at eliminating crime but in encouraging recidivism — a term that Magwitch himself seems to explain in "a mouthful of English": "In jail and out of jail, in jail and out of jail, in jail and out of jail" (p.360).

We can then read in Dickens's account of Magwitch's early life an indictment of a penal system that is unenlightened and unimaginative; but as Michel Foucault has argued, the official encouragement of large scale recividism has in fact, at least two uses. By isolating the delinquent, holding him/her up as an "Exhibition", symbolically summing up in his/her pathologised figure all forms of illegalities, official society can claim to have displaced criminality as a whole to the realm of the degraded "other", and at the same time leave in the shade those illegalities that it wishes to tolerate. (For example, Pip tolerates, and indeed participates in the shady activities of Jaggers and Wemmick, but the legally sanctioned system of distinguishing signs enables him to separate himself "genetically" from the convicts in the coach and indeed from the criminal underworld as a whole). Again by perpetuating "a closed milieu of delinquency", official society can pressurise it, place it under surveillance, penetrate it, constantly use it for its own purposes.

In *Great Expectations* the process by which criminality is legally identified and segregated, itself involves the use and the exploitation of the criminal milieu. To be sure the law is *publically* constituted as a strictly objective system of arbitration the accused is given certain rights, he/she is convicted only by trial in court, and arguments are evaluated in court according to whether or not they adhere, in Jaggers's phrase, "to the strict line of fact" (p.351). Yet in practice Jaggers's own spectacular successes in court depend not only on his ability to manipulate, repress, confuse facts, but even more crucially on his access to Newgate that is, to the biggest prison in London. Newgate is, in Wemmick's phrase, the "next thing" (p.249) to Jaggers's office and Jaggers himself, as Pip tells Estella, "has the reputation of being more in secrets of that dismal place than any man in London" (p.289). It is not merely that Jaggers can make enormous and effective use of "Newgate intelligence" in court. More crucially, it is precisely by penetrating the criminal milieu, by exploiting the precarious situation of the individual delinquent, alternatively bribing and threatening him/her, that Jaggers can use a whole range of illegalities to fight a case while keeping himself on the right side of the law.

> "Well Mas'r Jaggers", returned Mike, in the voice of a sufferer, "arter a great deal deal o'trouble I've found one, sir, as might do."
> "What is he prepared to swear?"
> "Well Mas'r Jaggers", said Mike wiping his nose on his fur cap this time, "in a general way anythink."
> Mister Jaggers suddenly became most irate. "Now, I warned you before", throwing his forefinger at his terrified client, "that if you ever presumed to talk in that way here, I'd make an example of you. You infernal scoundrel, how dare you tell me that ... Now be careful. In what station of life is this man?"

> Mike looked at his cap, and looked at the floor, and looked at the ceiling, and looked at the clerk, and even looked at me, before beginning to reply in a nervous manner, "We've dressed him like —" when my guardian blustered out:
> "What? You WILL will you ..."
> After some helpless casting about, Mike brightened up and began again:
> "He's dressed like a spectable pieman, A sort of pastry cook...".
> "Take him past that window and let me see him."
> The window indicated, was the office window. We all three went to it, behind the wire blind, and presently saw the client go by in an accidental manner, with a murderous looking individual.

Jaggers's methods of fighting a case; his actual success in court suggest that criminality, far from being a solid, easily indentifiable mass of activities that exists outside respectable society is, in fact, something that is far more ambiguous — something that constantly circulates through the fine underground channels that connect Newgate to the High Court. In *Great Expectations* the most palpable symbol of this constant traffic between criminality and respectability is the wealth that is generated in the criminal milieu but recycled back into respectable society.

5.4 CRIMINAL WEALTH AND RESPECTABILITY

Jaggers himself does not even attempt to conceal the criminal origins of his wealth. The starting point of Jaggers's career as a lawyer is his successful defence of a murderer, and the most noticeable objects in Jaggers's office are the villianous looking casts, made to the likeness of two hardened offenders who have been in Wemmick's words, "Famous clients of ours that got us a world of credit" (p.223). In fact Jaggers's criminal clients fetch him not only credit but also money. Wemmick stops at the individual cells at Newgate not only to gather intelligence or locate appropriate witnesses, but also to negotiate "fees".

With Wemmick the acquisition of criminal property — especially the property of prisoners condemned to death — has become so routine that it is made to appear as part of his cheery practicality.

> While he was putting up the other cast and coming down from the chair, the thought crossed my mind that all his personal jewellery was derived from like sources. As he had shown no diffidence on the subject, I ventured on the liberty of asking him the question when he stood before me, dusting his hands.
> "Oh yes", he returned, "these are all gifts of that kind. One brings another you see, that's the way of it.I always take 'em. They're curiosities. And they 're property. They may not be worth much, but, after all, they're property and portable — my guiding star always is, "Get hold of portable property".

What is important about Dickens's representation of Wemmick's transactions is not their extraordinariness but their ordinariness. The very fowl that Wemmick serves to Pip for dinner may have been acquired from a convict, but the signs of Wemmick's links with the criminal world coexist with — indeed are a constituent part of — the happy, almost idyllic ambience that envelops Wemmick's Walworth home:

> The interval between that time and supper, Wemmick devoted to showing me his collection of curiosities. They were mostly of a felonious character; comprising the pen with which a celebrated

> forgery had been committed, a distinguished razor or two — and several manuscript confessions — They were agreeably dispersed among small specimens of China and glass, various neat trifles made by the proprietor of the museum, and some tobacco-stoppers carved by the Aged.(pp.231-32.).

Wemmick's museum renders familiar and everyday what would be normally unmentionable in respectable discourse, and in the process makes visible the countless ties that in fact bind respectable society to its criminalised "other". Indeed Wemmick's remarkable museum may be seen as a microcosmic representation of the great world ouside, for just as murderous razors coexist with lovingly preserved tobacco stoppers carved by Wemmick's father in Wemmick's museum, Magwitch's money provides the material basis not only for Pip's life as a gentleman but also for the more positive qualities that Pip and Herbert develop after they join Clariker's firm. It is to Pip's great credit that he refuses to enjoy the benefits of Magwitch's wealth after he becomes aware of the identity of his real benefactor. But Pip's refusal can only be symbolic, for everything significant in Pip's life — his education, his acquisition of culture, values, friends, in short his "improvement", even in its most positive sense — is tied up inextricably with Magwitch's money. In the final analysis, it is this bringing together of the gentleman and the criminal, and at a more general level refinement and corruption, the fairy godmother and the witch, which expresses Dickens's radical skepticism with official assertions about the possibility of "self-improvement" and indeed about "progress" in a class ridden, internally divided society.

5.5 LET US SUM UP

If I were asked what I was doing in this Unit, I would say that I was exploring the *hematic* implications of the sensational disclosure that the novel makes at the level of the plot. The connections between criminality and respectability that the plot suggests, when it reveals that Magwitch rather than Miss Havisham is Pip's secret benefactor, is reinforced at the thematic level by the activities of the lawyer Jaggers. Thus Jaggers represents a legal system which is overtly dedicated to the business of segregating, by a strictly objective system, the criminal from the respectable. Moreover we also saw that this rooting out of criminality is reinforced by a whole system of branding that projects the criminal as the easily recognisable "other" of respectability. Yet this displacement of all forms of illegality on the pathologised figure of the branded criminal also serves to keep in the shade away from public scrutiny the innumerable transactions that go on all the time between the respectable and the criminal world. Can you remember how this is shown in the novel?

5.6 GLOSSARY

Recidivism	The tendency of those released from prison to get back to delinquency and thus be imprisoned again.
Michel Foucault	Author of *Discipline and Punish.*
Pathologized	Disease ridden
Delinquency	The life of a vagabond.

Microcosmic	A situation where the largest social or cultural tendencies are reflected in a mimaturised symbol or scene.
Psychotic	Crazy
Aberrations	Deviations from the "normal"
Dystopian	The opposite of Utopian.
Surveillance	To subject to constant monitoring

5.7 QUESTIONS

1) What would you say were the major changes that occur in Dickens's attitude to crime as he moves from his early to his later phase?

2) Write a note on the significance of Jaggers and Wemmick in *Great Expectations* taking into account material not just from this unit but also from the text.

3) "One of the achievements of *Great Expectations* is that refuses to demarcate the processes of respectability from those of criminality". Do you agree? Give a reasoned answer.

4) What in your opinion is the significance of Wemmick's museum?

5.8 SUGGESTED READINGS

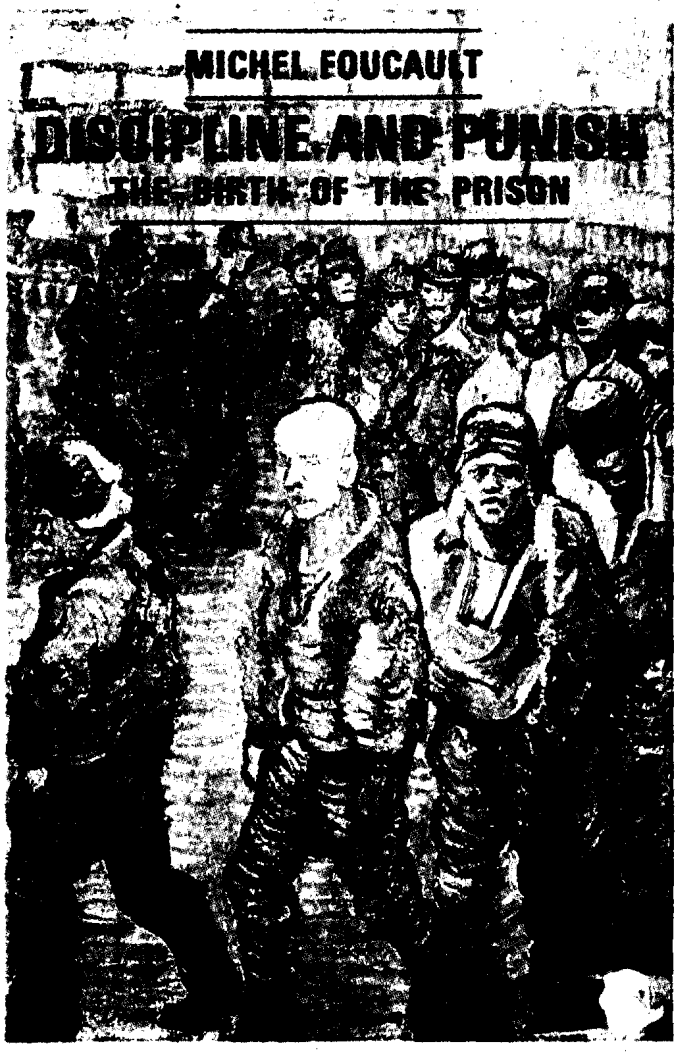
I want to make it clear at the outset that this reading list is not meant in any sense to intimidate you. It is not mandatory that you read every book or article included in this list. But at some stage of your development you may want to get back to *Great Expectations*, Dickens, and novel theory. If you do, perhaps this reading list will serve you as a basic guide. Also you might look at some of the titles here if you want to supplement your reading of *Great Expectations* and of the units included here.

WORKS ON *GREAT EXPECTATIONS*

Peter Brooks, *Reading for Plot : Design and Intention in Narrative*, 1970.
R. Glamour, "Dickens and the Self-Help Idea" in *The Victorian and Social Protest: A symposium*, 1973.
F.R. and Q.D.Leavis, *Dickens the Novelist*, 1970.
J.Lucas, *The Melancholy Man*, 1970
G.Smith, *Dickens, Money and Society*, 1967.
G.Thurley, *The Dickens Myth*, 1976.
S.Conor, *Charles Dickens* 1985.
J.Brown, *Novelist in The Market Place*, 1982.
D.Van Ghent, *The English Novel*, 1953.
John Carey, *The Violent Efigy*, 1973.
K.Flint, *Dickens*, 1986.
Franco Moretti, *The Way of the World: The Buildungsroman in European Culture* 1987.

Readings for the historical background

K.Fielden, "Samuel Smiles and *Self Help" Victorian Studies 12* 1968.
J.F.C.Harrison, "The Victorian Gospel of Success" *Victorian Studies, 1* 1957
T.Nairn, "The English Political Elite", *The New Left Review No.60* 1970.
P.Anderson, "Origins of the Present Crisis", *The New Left Review No. 24* 1964.
H.Perkin, *The Origin of Modern English Society*, 1968.
G.Best, *Mid-Victorian Britain 1815-1875*, 1970.
E.J.Hobsbawm, *Industry and Empire* 1968.
E.J.Hobsbawm, *The Age of Capital*, 1975.



GENERAL WORKS THAT I FOUND USEFUL IN THE WRITING OF THESE UNITS

M.M.Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoyevsky's Poetics*, 1984.
The Formal Method in Literary Scholarship, 1984.
Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in The Age of Mechanical Reproduction", *Illuminations*, 1969.
Roland Barthes, *S/Z*, 1974.
Herman Rebel, "Why not Old Maria — Or Someone Very like Her?" *Social History XIII* 1988.
Robert Darnton, *The Great Cat Massacre* 1984.
Fredrick Jameson, "The Ideology of Theory" in *Ideologies of Theory* 1988.
Robert Hughes, *The Fatal Shore* 1987.
Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* 1979.
J.Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Bourgeois Public Sphere* 1980.